

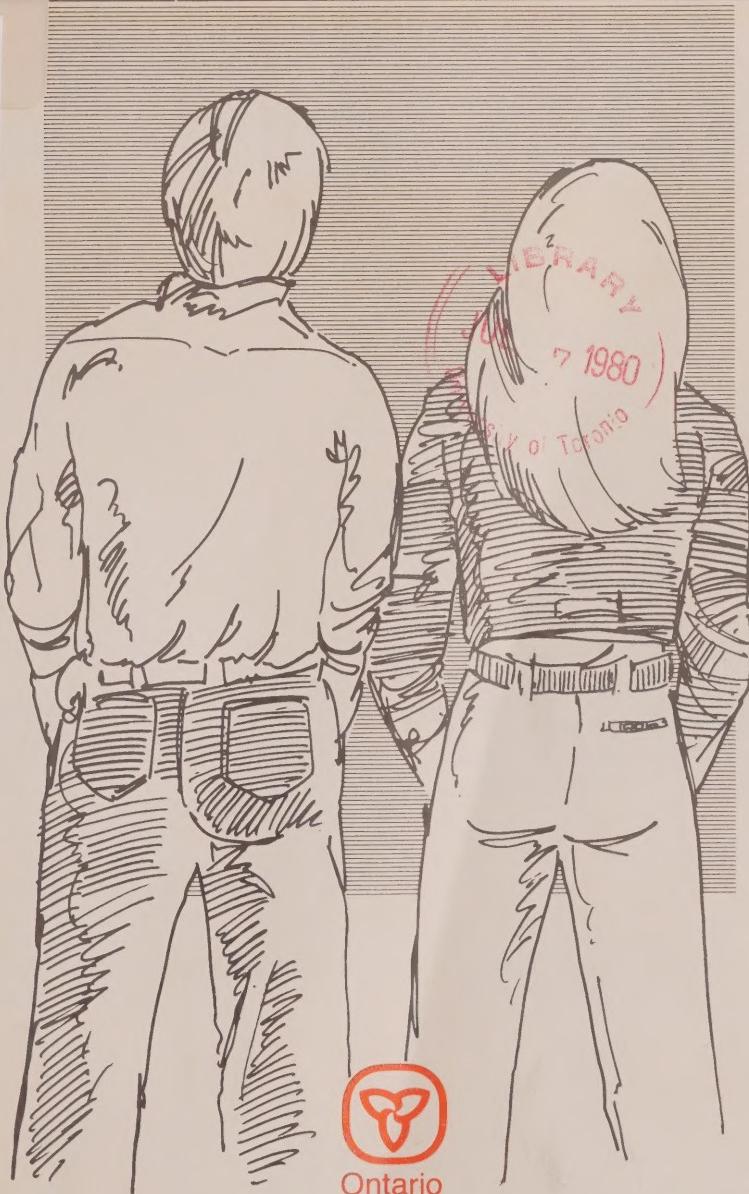
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# RESPONSIBILITY



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Earlier booklets in this series dealt with specific types of crimes — shoplifting, exhibitionism, impaired driving, and vandalism — and their impact upon victims, offenders and the general public. This booklet is different as it explores a concept, RESPONSIBILITY, which is fundamental to our society and essential to justice itself. The booklet is designed to serve as a stimulus for parents, teachers, youth workers, police and others who work with young people.

Additional copies of this booklet can be obtained from the Ontario Government Bookstore, 880 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1Z8.

This publication is also available in the French language.

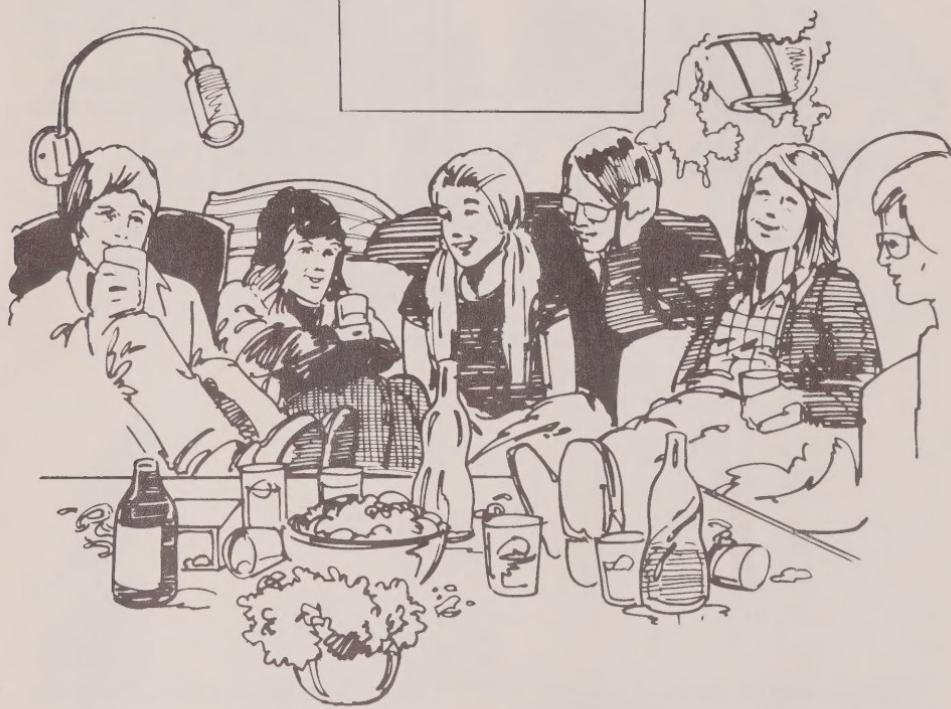


Provincial  
Secretariat  
for Justice

The Honourable Gord Walker, Q.C.  
Provincial Secretary for Justice

The story and characters described in  
"The Incident" portion of this booklet are  
fictitious. Any resemblance to persons  
living or dead is purely coincidental.

# THE INCIDENT



It had been a good party at Tony's place. Tony had tried hard to keep the event running smoothly and for most of the evening he had succeeded. Even Greg and Paul, who usually were trouble-makers, had seemed happy enough on

the beer they had brought – for a while! By midnight the two were looking for more excitement. When Tony wasn't looking they raided the family liquor supply. That was when things started to go wrong.



"Can you help me get these guys out of here?" Tony asked his best friend, Jim. "I promised my parents I'd keep everybody under control but these two are impossible. They're either going to wreck the place or get sick all over everything."

Jim looked at Mary. They'd been going together for two years and were practically engaged. "Do you mind if we drive them home? It would help Tony a lot."

Mary didn't like the idea of getting mixed up with a couple of guys in that condition, but what could she say?

"Okay. It's almost time to leave anyway, I guess."

With a great deal of difficulty, Tony, Jim and Mary finally got the pair into the back seat of Jim's car. They couldn't stop Greg from stuffing the last two beers into his coat pocket. Paul, who had just uncapped a fresh one, insisted on bringing it and another bottle with him.

"I wouldn't want to leave this around for those kids," he jeered. "It might get them into trouble!"

Mary was worried. She knew that it was both illegal and stupid to let anyone drink in the car. Jim just hoped that the beer would keep them quiet.

Off they drove....

They stopped for a red light and, while waiting, Paul rolled down a window and threw his empty bottle in the direction of the traffic signal. It landed on the grass nearby.

"You're a lousy shot!" Greg scoffed.  
"You couldn't hit a barn door."

Jim stepped on the gas hard to shut them up and they slammed back into the seat.

"Hey, what are you trying to do? Don't you know about drinking and driving?" They laughed uproariously at their own wit.

Mary was getting angry. "Settle down back there, you two," she ordered.

There were no more problems until they reached the intersection by the hospital. Then, as they slowed down to go around the corner, Greg threw another empty bottle out of the window on his side of the car. They were passing a bus stop and, at that precise moment, a man stepped out of the shelter. The bottle hit him full in the face.

"Oh no, you hit him!" Mary gasped.  
"You hit that man right in the face, you stupid drunk!"

Jim slowed the car momentarily and looked back at the man who lay on the pavement. Then Jim shot the car ahead as fast as he could.





"Stop," Mary cried. "We must go back and help him!"

"There's a hospital across the street. They'll help him." Jim kept his foot on the gas. They didn't get very far.

Two policemen in a cruiser were leaving the emergency entrance to the hospital and saw what happened. One officer jumped out to go to the aid of the injured man. The other officer called for assistance on the car radio and sped off in pursuit of Jim's car.

A siren screamed, red lights flashed, and the police cruiser overtook the young people's car. A blue arm waved them over to the side of the road. The policeman jumped out of the cruiser, walked over to the car and shone his flashlight inside.

"What do you think you're doing —

injuring a man and driving away?" he asked.

The officer ordered Jim to get out of the car and to show his driver's licence. Jim did as he was told. He was scared.

Mary was scared too but she had more presence of mind. She tried to explain, "We were just driving these two home. We haven't been drinking or anything."

A loud burp sounded from the back seat and Paul started to laugh.

The officer looked inside the car again and said to Paul and Greg, "Somebody here has been drinking. This car smells like a brewery."

Paul and Greg were ordered to get out and they stumbled all over each other trying to obey. The policeman asked each person for identification but nobody had any except Jim who had already shown his driver's licence.

Then the officer checked the back seat and found the bottle of beer which Greg had slipped under the seat.

"That does it," he announced. "You're going down to the station, all of you. Here, give me your keys. We'll lock your car and leave it right where it is."

By this time another police cruiser had arrived. The officers frisked the boys before they got into the cruiser and Mary had to empty her pockets and unbutton her coat. Off they drove.

"You know that this is serious, don't you?" the policeman who was driving asked Jim and Mary. "We'll check at the

hospital on the way down to the station and find out how badly that man is injured. I hope for your sakes he hasn't been blinded or something."

Nobody spoke much after that. As they pulled up near the emergency entrance of the hospital, the officer turned and said, "You know, you kids wouldn't be in this mess if you had shown responsibility!"

Mary choked back a lump in her throat. She looked at Jim and then at the officer. "But they can't hold us responsible, can they?" she asked.

No one answered.



### For Discussion . . .

#### The Incident: Who Was Responsible?

In the incident just described, one of the police officers said, ". . . you kids wouldn't be in this mess if you had shown responsibility!".

What do you think about Tony's responsibility for what happened at his party? Did Tony handle the situation appropriately when Greg and Paul got into the liquor supply? What else could he have done?

Did Jim and Mary do the best thing when Tony asked for their help? What alternatives did they have? What could Jim have done when Paul threw the first empty bottle out the car window? What was Jim's responsibility after the bottle hit the man in the face? Which was more important — making sure that an injured person got help or avoiding a hassle? To what degree was each person in the story responsible for what took place?

What is your answer to Mary's question at the hospital? "But they can't hold us responsible, can they?"

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# RESPONSIBILITY AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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"If you had shown responsibility. . . ."

How many times has that been said?

- Responsibility for doing work properly.
- Responsibility for doing a fair share of household chores.
- Responsibility for not spreading disease.
- Responsibility for getting to work or class on time.
- Responsibility for driving carefully.

Individuals gradually take on more responsibility from the time they learn to brush their teeth and to tie their own shoelaces. The list grows longer as one grows older. This gradual growth in personal and social responsibilities is reflected in our laws. In Ontario, for example, a young person suspected of committing an offence will be treated by the courts as a juvenile rather than as an adult, except in exceptional circumstances.

Psychiatrist Dr. William Glasser, in his book, *Reality Therapy*, makes the following statement concerning responsibility: "Irresponsible people, always seeking to gain happiness without assuming responsibility, find only brief periods of joy, but not the deep-seated satisfaction

which accompanies responsible behaviour." He defines responsibility as "the ability to fulfill one's needs and to do so in a way that does not deprive others of the ability to fulfill their needs".  
(W. Glasser, M.D., *Reality Therapy*, (New York: Harper & Row), 1965.)

An individual's ability to make choices and to take responsibility for decisions and actions contributes much to personal dignity. Remember how good it felt when you took the family car out by yourself for the first time without another person sitting there beside you second-guessing your every move, or when you got your first job and started to earn your own money? That was all part of learning to handle responsibility, of maturing, of becoming independent.

Responsibility, then, is being able and willing to answer for what one chooses to do and say. It is knowing right from wrong and having the courage to act accordingly, sometimes even in the face of active opposition.

When everyone acts responsibly, a community becomes a better place in which to live.

# RESPONSIBILITY: A FACT OF LIFE

One definition of responsibility is moral, legal or mental accountability. Another is reliability or trustworthiness. However defined, responsibility is important on many levels – personal, familial, social, financial, corporate, civic, national, international, even global. In all circumstances it involves the way in which individuals or groups are accountable for themselves and for their effect on others, through everything they say and do. Whether people are acting for themselves or on behalf of businesses, unions, voluntary associations or governments, their activities involve responsibility.

Responsibility is learned initially by experience in the family where parents and children depend on one another and are responsible to and for one another. This is where the learning begins that is later extended into school and community. While schools, churches and other institutions contribute significantly to the development of the individual, it is in the home that responsibility first becomes a fact of life.

Conceiving a child should be the most responsible act of all. Father and mother together are responsible for a new human being and for providing the child not only with food and shelter but also with love, security and guidance toward its own sense of self, independence, and responsibility.



# RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Our system of government encourages people to exercise their rights as free and equal citizens and to make complaints if they feel they are not being treated fairly. In Ontario, for example, an Ombudsman has been appointed by the Legislature to investigate citizens' complaints against provincial government bodies.

As we mature we become aware of the dual nature of our freedoms. We learn that the privileges we enjoy carry with them accompanying responsibilities. As citizens we have responsibilities that make our rights possible. These duties and obligations are the "dues" payable for membership in our community.



George Bernard Shaw once made a very pointed suggestion about rights and responsibilities when he said that "Every person who owes his life to civilized society and who has enjoyed since his childhood its very costly protections and advantages should appear at reasonable intervals before a properly qualified jury to justify his existence. . . . Nothing less will really make people responsible citizens." Shaw was speaking tongue in cheek, but his point is well taken. It is true that sometimes we do not appreciate the very costly protections and advantages that are ours because others have struggled to set them in place.

Good fortune is sometimes taken for granted and we do not realize how much

it depends upon our willingness to act responsibly. The laws are designed to protect the rights of each of us while each of us is responsible for upholding the laws. Our freedom depends upon our commitment to observe the laws, to think seriously about how they can be maintained and improved, and to do what is necessary to accomplish these goals.

Some people, however, are not quick to assume the responsibilities that make their rights possible. Just as we purchase clothing with money or education with taxes, we must pay for our freedoms through acceptance of the obligations that accompany the rights which we enjoy. We cannot maintain our rights if we neglect our duties.

### For Discussion. . .

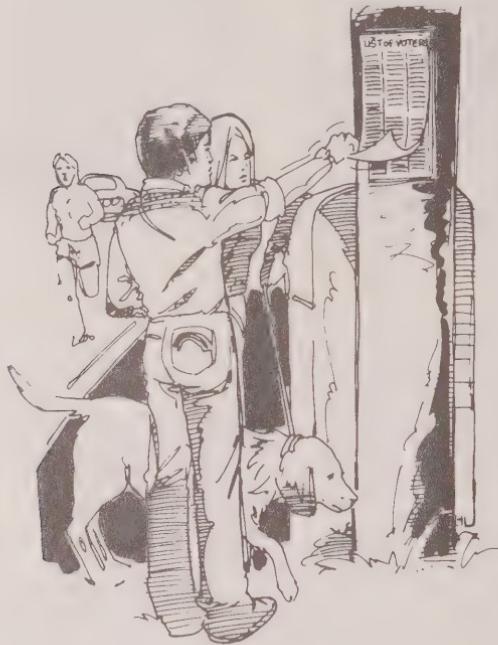
#### **Responsibilities and Rights**

What are some of the reciprocal responsibilities and rights of

- children and parents?
- students and teachers?
- minorities and majorities?
- citizens and their elected representatives?
- citizens and government officials?

Explain how a proper adjustment of duties, rights, obedience and independence will produce a happy home, an effective school and a thriving community.

# RESPONSIBILITY AND DEMOCRACY



The laws of this land are ours. By electing members to represent us in the Federal Parliament and Provincial Legislatures, we all share in the responsibility of choosing what laws will be enacted.

Those elected serve as representatives of the people when they carry out their legislative duties. The power to make new laws and to amend old ones is entrusted to them by the people. It follows that it is the responsibility of voters to be well informed about candidates and election issues and to take part in every election.

A person can be well informed and aware of political issues by the time he or she reaches voting age. Reading newspapers, discussing current issues, participating in concerned community groups, attending candidates' meetings at election time and communicating with provincial and federal representatives are all ways to increase knowledge and assist us in choosing our representatives. We should look forward to becoming voters and thus having a say in the laws of our land.



### For Discussion . . .

#### Unpopular Laws

Are there any particular laws which you think are unreasonable or unjust?

Are there any other laws which you dislike? Why?

What can you do about a law with which you disagree?

The rights of the individual carry with them an attendant responsibility to respect and uphold the laws of the land. Laws don't belong only to the legislators, to the police or to the courts — they belong to all citizens. Our system of justice is chosen, paid for, and empowered by us and it is up to each of us to help make it work well.

# PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY AND CRIME PREVENTION

The entire community must share in the tasks related to the administration of justice and the prevention of crime. Police cannot solve crimes that are not reported. Courts cannot administer justice if citizens will not act as jurors and witnesses. Citizens must get involved to ensure their own safety, assist the police and prevent crimes.

Suppose that you, perhaps along with others, witness an accident. Would you identify yourself and offer to testify or would you presume that someone else would volunteer instead? What would you do if you saw a car endanger someone at a crosswalk? If you see a car ignore the flashing lights of a school bus that has stopped to let out its passengers, what do you think you should do?



The responsible individual will not condone lawbreaking or participate in illegal acts. A person is not "chicken" for refusing to steal a shopping cart to go joy-riding down a hill, to throw stones through windows in the dark of night, or to take part in other activities which may result in

damage to property or injury to other people. Instead of acting inconsiderately or recklessly, that person is demonstrating good sense, maturity in outlook and responsibility in behaviour. Sometimes it's surprising how mature behaviour will earn the respect of others.



One can discourage lawbreaking in other ways too. The simplest way to prevent crime is not to do anything that will invite it – not to leave a car unlocked with its key in the ignition, not to leave a purse or wallet where anyone can pick it up, not to leave the key to your home under a mat or in some other obvious place, and not to leave a school or club locker unlocked.

While common sense alone may dictate that we should obey the laws that we elect our legislators to make and should assist police in upholding the laws that we employ them to enforce, many of our responsibilities have a legal as well as a moral basis.

The law states, for example, that it is the duty of any private citizen to come to the aid of a police officer who identifies himself or herself as such and requests assistance.

The law also imposes a duty to report instances of suspected child abuse, and imposes a penalty on professionals who fail to do so.

### Criminal Code

"... Every one who . . . omits, without reasonable excuse, to assist a public officer or peace officer in the execution of his duty in arresting a person or in preserving the peace, after having reasonable notice that he is required to do so . . . is guilty of . . . an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for two years, or . . . an offence punishable on summary conviction." [S.118(b), (d) and (e).]

### The Child Welfare Act, 1978

"... Every person who has information of the abandonment, desertion or need for protection of a child or the infliction of abuse upon a child shall forthwith report the information. . ." [S.49(1).]

"... Every person who has reasonable grounds to suspect in the course of the person's professional or official duties that a child has suffered or is suffering from abuse that may have been caused or permitted by a person who has or has had charge of the child shall forthwith report the suspected abuse . . ." [S.49(2).]

"... Every person who . . . contravenes any provision of . . . subsection 2 of section 49 . . . is guilty of an offence and on summary conviction by the court is liable to a fine of not more than \$1,000 . . ." [S.94(1) (f) (ii).]

Laws are passed in order to protect the rights of everyone.

The speed limits at which one can drive a car on various roads, for example, are regulated by law and altered from time to time as conditions change. They are for our protection. The laws that prohibit drivers from using the roads when their judgment and ability are likely to be impaired by alcohol or other drugs are for everyone's protection whether driving, accepting a ride, walking or cycling.

Alcohol acts as an anaesthetic; it can make rational behaviour difficult or im-

possible. When people are not sober they are much more likely to act irresponsibly and dangerously. This is true of people of every age. Younger people, however, have had less time to develop and to practise responsible behaviour and this is one of the reasons why there are laws that do not allow people to consume alcoholic beverages until they reach a certain age.

Not only are there laws with respect to underage drinking in itself, but also with respect to the use of both alcohol and motor vehicles in general.

### **For Discussion... Responsibility in Action**

What would you do if you were a passenger in a car in which the driver was showing off in a dangerous way?

What would you do if some of your friends decided to let the air out of the tires of a car belonging to someone whom you disliked?

Discuss the use of alcoholic beverages at different ages. How does this relate to responsibility? How can one's use of alcohol affect others?

Discuss the concept of parental responsibility as it might apply in the case of underage drinking.

You discover that the waste from an industrial plant is polluting a stream in your area. You feel concerned about this pollution. What action can you take?

You believe that a company is misrepresenting a product or a service. You are concerned about this misrepresentation. What can you do about it?

# A FAIR SHARE OF RESPONSIBILITY

Social justice depends upon all citizens assuming their responsibilities to the fullest extent possible. It also depends upon citizens acting jointly to assist others where necessary. With rights come responsibilities and, with responsibilities, rights.

Many of our citizens are able and willing to shoulder a greater than average share of responsibility for the well-being of others or for the community at large. They give their time and energy to activities such as voluntary organizations serving in the areas of health, social services, education and the arts. Many people in shouldering such responsibilities achieve a great sense of satisfaction and personal achievement.

There is always the possibility that for one reason or another, voluntary or involuntary, some people will not fulfill their individual responsibilities and governments or other institutions will have to step in to fill the gap. There must be, however, a balance between public responsibility and the individual's own

responsibility for his or her present and future well-being. There is a kind of thinking that leads to leaving full responsibility for one's health in the hands of doctors instead of realizing that there is much that each of us can do to maintain our own health by improving our diet, exercise, and general life-style. Similarly, there is much that each of us can do to prevent accidents, discourage law-breaking and promote justice.

The well-being of our community depends upon all citizens assuming a fair share of responsibility.

To the extent that each of us works at taking on our share of responsibility as family members, as students, as workers and as citizens, we will individually and collectively have a greater voice in determining the course and conditions of our future.

Assuming our fair share of personal and social responsibilities will ensure a continuation of the rights and privileges we all enjoy.

## For discussion . . .

### Community Responsibilities

What do you think society's responsibility should be towards:

- the mentally or physically disabled?
- religious and cultural minorities?
- the exceptionally gifted?
- political refugees?
- alcoholics and people with drug related problems?
- the chronically unemployed?

What are the individual's responsibilities in these situations?

How can we achieve a desirable balance between society's responsibility and that of the individual for his or her own well-being?

What can you do to assume more responsibility for your own future? For the future of your community?

**Other Booklets in this Series:**

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